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THIS ISSUE

Changes to Vocational Rehabilitation Rules – Qualification Requirements for Supervisors of Interns

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Purpose

This Provider Bulletin communicates changes to the department's rules on vocational rehabilitation, Chapter 296-19A WAC. Specifically, the rule changes occurred in the qualifications requirements for vocational counselors who supervise the work and professional development of vocational interns. The changes discussed in this Bulletin take effect July 1, 2004.

What are the major changes to the vocational rehabilitation supervisory requirements?

WAC 296-19A-210(2) describes the requirements vocational providers must meet in order to supervise vocational interns within the Washington industrial insurance system. The rule, as adopted on March 31, 2004, makes several changes that allow a broader range of experience to qualify vocational rehabilitation counselors (VRCs) to supervise and that strengthen the accountability of vocational supervisors for promoting and monitoring their interns' development.

- While supervisors are still required to qualify as VRCs, the rule changes removes language already stated in WAC 296-19A-210(1) and simply references that subsection directly.
- The current rule requires that providers who supervise interns provide proof of "five years full-time experience providing direct vocational services to Washington state injured workers." The changes broaden the qualifying experience for supervisors to "providing, evaluating, analyzing, and/or assessing vocational services". While five years of full-time experience is still required, only three of those five years are required to be under Title 51 RCW.
- The rule changes allow a maximum of thirty-six (36) months of intern status to count toward the five years of full-time experience. Currently, any time in intern status may be counted as qualifying experience.
- Finally the rule changes clarify the expectations for supervisors, in terms of educating, monitoring, and promoting the development of interns. The rule specifically cites, but does not limit, the responsibilities of the supervisor as follows:
 - Monitoring the billing, professional work, and professional behavior of the intern;
 - Promoting the professional development of the intern and assisting him or her toward becoming a counselor;
 - Communicating statute, rule and policy to the intern.

What are the effects of the rule changes?

The department fulfills several goals in enacting these rule changes. First, the department can recognize a broader variety of work backgrounds as satisfactory for becoming a supervisor of interns. While applicants' work must still be primarily vocational in its capacity, the new rule is not restrictive in requiring "direct" vocational rehabilitation experience.

Second, the department provides some flexibility for those whose work backgrounds are not entirely within the framework of Title 51 RCW. While it is vital that those who are supervising interns have a strong knowledge of Washington industrial insurance, the rule changes do allow for those who have gained valuable work experience in other systems to apply that experience toward the five years total required experience.

Third, the department recognizes the value of the internship in a provider's professional development. By allowing up to 36 months of intern status to count toward the supervisory requirements, the department can also ensure that a prospective supervisor has the requisite knowledge and experience as a qualified vocational counselor. This change reflects the typical vocational internship length of 36 months, and it is also consistent with recognizing internship experience in meeting the qualifications for forensic providers.

Finally, the department believes that providing mentoring and direction to interns is one of the most important factors in ensuring that injured workers receive effective and beneficial services. Activities such as monitoring the intern's work, billing, and behavior, as well as communicating statute, rule and policy, place additional accountability on supervisors to guide the interns progress towards successful completion of the internship.

When are the rule changes effective?

The rule changes were adopted on March 31, 2004. They take effect on July 1, 2004.

How can I get more information?

Vocational providers and other interested parties may find out more about the rule changes through the department's web site:

<http://www.lni.wa.gov/ClaimsInsurance/Vocational/WhatsNew/default.asp>

The final version of the rule changes and the department's concise explanatory statement are available on the web site.

For additional information about applying to become a supervisor of vocational interns, please contact the department's Private Sector Rehabilitation Services (PSRS) unit (Rich Wilson, Supervisor) at (360) 902-6756.